

ARTS/Aiken County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan
Focus Group: Aiken County
Conducted at City of Aiken Municipal Building
October 3, 2011

Focus Group Participants:

- **Liz Lewis;** liz4jesus@gmail.com; (803) 642-9940 (Visually impaired, local chapter of National Federation of the Blind)
- **Renee Staggs;** rstaggs@aikenydc.org; (803) 642-8832 (Tri Development Learning Center (involved in Eat Smart Move More) and many patrons of the center have disabilities that prevent them from driving)
- **John McMurtrie;** jmcmurtrie@scvrd.state.sc.us; (803) 641-7730 (Aiken Vocational Rehabilitation Center, and many patrons do not drive and rely on alternate transportation – where they live is where they have to work)
- **Glenn Parker;** gparker@cityofaikensc.gov; (803) 642-7632 (City of Aiken Parks, Recreation & Tourism, which includes senior commission)
- **LaWana McKenzie;** lmckenz7@gmail.com; (803) 593-5532 (Aiken County Council)
- **Will Williams;** wwilliams@edpsc.org; (803) 641-3300 (Director of Economic Development Partnership for Aiken County – supports existing industry and also tries to bring in new business (also personally a cyclist and triathlete))
- **Scott Sterling;** sssterling@northaugusta.net; (803) 441-4225 (City of North Augusta Planning Department)

Staff Attending:

- **Gerald Jefferson,** Aiken County
- **Stephen Strohminger,** Aiken County
- **Sandra Korbelik,** City of Aiken
- **Mary Huffstetler,** MPH and Associates, Inc.
- **Jean Crowther,** Alta Planning + Design

Let's talk about what we have in the region that is already good.

- The changes in downtown Aiken have really improved wheelchair access
- The new signalized systems with a pedestrian countdown for crossing
- Increased amount of two foot shoulders along roads in the area is beneficial
- City of Aiken adopted a strategic plan that includes biking and walking language which has a long-term effect on mindset of local leadership
- Senior commission that has newly formed is helpful
- Greater awareness of health impacts for residents in the area

Who would be the best partners for programs and initiatives?

- Aiken ESMM was chartered 2 months ago – Aiken County is one of the fattest counties in one of the fattest states
- SCDHEC helped to initiate the effort
- Aiken Bicycle Club is very active in these types of efforts.

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Where are the ideal places to bike and walk, right now?

- Hitchcock Woods – though it needs a bike trail surrounding it
- North Augusta Greenway
- Citizens' Park and Odell Weeks Park
- Harrison Caver Park has facilities that are well-used, though not necessarily ideal

What are the barriers to people biking and walking?

- The Rudy Mason Parkway (SR 118) is not maintained which prevents people from wanting to use it.
- Also, if something were to happen along the Rudy Mason Parkway there is no way for others to see/respond.
- Banks Mill is a physical barrier to get to Citizens' Park which would connect to the grocery store (from Hopeland)
- Inconsistencies to where there is a sidewalk and where there isn't – sidewalk gaps
- Bike trails end also
- Being connected to what is already available would be an improvement

What are the key destinations that should be connected?

- McKenzie would like a trail to follow Horse Creek from Aiken to Augusta
- Most populated area is Graniteville (whole Valley area) but not very well connected
- As a cyclist, SR 421 is where I feel most comfortable.
- Milbrook, Kennedy, South Aiken Schools (and other schools), North Aiken has a Safe Routes to School grant.
- Aiken Tech has no walkable neighborhoods around it – sidewalks extended to USC Aiken (but on wrong side of street)
- Certain schools are not allowed to walk or ride bikes to school – talk to bus transportation office
- Aiken Elementary on Pine Log Road serves a huge neighborhood and no safe access
- School siting is an issue
- Create a staging area to schools and industrial parks where people can get to that point, and then walk or bike from there
- Citizens Park is a transit stop for Best Friend Express – access to the fixed route bus stops is difficult
- Where each bus route starts, there are no sidewalks
- Stop at Odell Weeks Activity Center is not safe
- Need bus shelters – all that is present now is a sign on a telephone pole
- Best Friends Express has bicycle racks on all buses, APT does also
- North Augusta now requires bicycle parking in all new development – this has been in effect since 2008 for all commercial development
- Bicycle racks need to be installed at public buildings

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What programs would be most helpful?

- There is no way to identify bicyclists or pedestrians that are breaking the law (but a drivers license plate number is available for cars).
- Safety is a major concern
- Need to promote the economic development aspect of biking and walking
- There is a real concern in Aiken that the municipalities will go into neighborhoods and take pieces of their property and build a trail – protecting private property is an issue.
- Provide examples of neighborhoods that improved through new biking/walking infrastructure and the benefits that they gained from that.
- Use the North Augusta Greenway as an example – the biggest complaint now is that it isn't being built fast enough and that it is crowded.
- Educational workshop with elected officials discussing the benefits of biking and walking
- Start with the low-hanging fruit so that you do not set yourself up for failure
- Share the road signs.... Needs to be more clear exactly what share the road means.

What is the low-hanging fruit? What projects are those?

- Within the cities
- Safe crossing across Whiskey Road
- Wayfinding signage
- Educating citizens about the places where it is safe to walk (with safe parking)
- Expand North Augusta Greenway paths out into the county... beyond the North Augusta city boundaries... need intergovernmental coordination to connect those dots
- Whiskey Road is dangerous for bicycling
- Target groups – people using alternative transportation and leisure bicyclists

Where are the challenging intersections or corridors?

- Dixie Clay Road is very challenging, but beautiful/scenic. Trucks use the corridor and are driving too fast. (Major concern of McKenzie) Road is part of state bike route
- Five Notch Road
- SR 118 Bypass
- Pine Log Road
- Intersection of Hampton Ave NW and York Street in City of Aiken – 90% of pedestrians do not cross at either of the crosswalks.
- Shiloh Heights Area – come to town along SR 19
- Whiskey Road South... open ditches, no sidewalks – have some money to add that, but public works department does not want to include buffer
- Belvedere Clearwater Road (back to I-520 is in LRTP)
- Clearwater needs better pedestrian crossing

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- Graniteville Recreation Center – children crossing US 1 (near Greenville-Aiken Road) – possibly need a mid-block crossing there
- Cherokee Drive and US 1 – trying to get to retail businesses (motels, fast food restaurants, etc)
- UPS call center on Clifford – sidewalk from Whiskey to the corporate center
- Aiken Tech – shopping center is planned across the street (long-term, in future), but how would students access that center – how would they cross the street
- USC Aiken is going to build multi-million-dollar elevated bridge across University Parkway from Convocation Center to the campus
- Gregg Park across Trolley Line Road

What are the preferred facility types?

- Educational and philosophical difference in addressing bicyclists on the road
- Cyclists want to have the same right of way as vehicles but a separated area which creates a design issue
- The cycling clubs want to ride in the road
- Aiken wants to look at routes – however the facility falls out during design
- Need to not forget the “necessity” bicyclists and walkers

What are the maintenance needs?

- Whiskey Road sidewalk is narrow
- Cobblestones downtown are not very wheelchair friendly
- Mailboxes hang over sidewalks on Pine Log Road

Final Thoughts – Important Focus Points of the Plan

- Philosophically we want to move in this direction but how do we get to implementation on the private side – need to incorporate into regulations
- Safety is the selling point
- Newspaper is the best way to get the word out
- Capitalize on the areas that are already easy and nice to bike
- Courtesy among drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians have equal value; maybe hold a summit between each of these groups in the communities that would focus on increasing awareness/respect for each other
- Bike paths
- All planning for new facilities should address walking and biking
- Encourage people to use alternative transportation
- Combined City and County funding source for the long-term plan
- Connection between cities of North Augusta and Aiken
- Connectivity to the great “pockets” available in the region
- Route between Aiken up to Edgefield – Northwest connectivity (create a triangle)

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- Implement it! Don't put it on a shelf!
- North Augusta Greenway to Augusta Canal – connecting those is a positive regional resource.
- Be mindful of the fact that in the more economically, depressed neighborhoods, the only way for some people to get from Point A to point B is to walk or bike. Therefore, using bikes for recreational purposes may not be a higher priority with most people in those neighborhoods.